

Checklist for New Family Caregivers



If you are new to family caregiving, you are probably facing some important life changes, and you may feel overwhelmed, scared or frustrated. You may also feel at a loss for what to do. These feelings are completely normal. The checklist below can help you learn more about your new responsibilities, the services and support options that may be available to you, and how to plan for the future.

You can also get started by calling VA's Caregiver Support Line toll-free at 1-855-260-3274. The Support Line's sole purpose is to help you – the wife or husband, mother or father, sister or brother, daughter or son, or loving family member or friend – who cares for a Veteran. VA's Caregiver Support Line has licensed caring professionals standing who can:

- Tell you about the assistance available from VA.
- Help you access services and benefits.
- Connect you with your local Caregiver Support Coordinator at a VA medical center near you.
- Just listen, if that's what you need right now.

VA's Caregiver Support Line is available Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m. ET, and Saturday 10:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. ET.

Know what you're up against and learn about the disease, condition or injury affecting the Veteran you care for.

- Talk to the Veteran's health care provider. Ask:
 - Is this a long-term or short-term situation?
 - What are the Veteran's specific care needs?
 - Will those needs change over time?
- Learn about special skills. For example, ask how to safely move someone with limited mobility or how to give medication.
- Do some research and get more information from books, pamphlets or the Internet.



Explore your options.

- Figure out what specific needs – meals, bathing, household chores, physical therapy and doctor appointments – the Veteran you are caring for will have.
- To meet those needs, talk it over with the Veteran you are caring for, relatives, friends and the Veteran's health care provider.
- If you are currently employed, check to see if you are eligible to take time off from work under the **Family Medical Leave Act**.



Research the resources in your community.

- Talk with the local medical center staff about their services, and reach out to the county health department to inquire about available public resources.
- Explore options such as adult day health care, meal delivery, transportation services, respite services and in-home support services.
- Talk to your local VA Caregiver Support Coordinator about resources that can help you learn more about caregiving. To find your local Caregiver Support Coordinator, visit the [Help Near Home page](#) on VA's Caregiver Support website.
- Get to know the VA social worker or nurse who specializes in arranging care.
- Call your local area agency on aging and contact organizations specific to the disease, such as the Alzheimer's Association or Brain Injury Association of America.
- Keep the information you collect in a notebook or on the computer. Even if you don't use it now, you may later on.

Plan for immediate care.

- Make sure the Veteran you care for is involved. Ask what he or she thinks when it comes to immediate care.
- Try making the living environment better suited for special needs, such as a walker, wheelchair or bedside commode.
- Keep track of the Veteran's health and care needs. A log or journal of eating patterns, medications and physical symptoms is the easiest and smartest way to go.
- Get other family members involved in providing support and make a list of who is responsible for what tasks.

Enlist the help of others.

- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. You don't have to do it all alone and you shouldn't feel like you have to. Trying to do it all will eventually burn you out.
- Make a list of friends and family who are willing to help.
- List and schedule the tasks others can do, such as running errands or bringing dinner.
- Ask a friend, family member or neighbor to call people or arrange for help.

Organize important information.

- Write down:
 - Doctors' names, phone numbers and addresses.
 - Medical name of the illness or injury.
 - Prescription numbers, names (brand name and generic, as available) and doses.
 - Pharmacy contact information.
- Organize financial information such as household bills, loans and debts, bank accounts and insurance policies.
- Photocopy important information such as the Veteran's VA ID Card, Social Security card, driver's license and insurance cards. Keep these important documents where you can locate them quickly.

Plan for the future.

- Ask an attorney or your VA social worker for information on Advance Directives and Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care.
- Get information about the long-term prognosis. Knowing what you're facing will help you plan better for the outcome.
- Help the Veteran you care for assess his or her finances. Invite a financial advisor familiar with care issues to talk with the Veteran you care for and come up with a financial plan.

Take care of yourself, too.

- Talk to your friends and family members and let them support you.
- Join a support group.
- Talk with your employer about an Employee Assistance Program that provides support for Caregivers.
- Let go of less important commitments. No one can do it all.
- Keep doing at least one activity or hobby that brings you pleasure.
- Take regular breaks from family caregiving.

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- Make sure you are meeting your own care needs: eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly and spending time with family or friends.
 - If you feel overwhelmed, talk to your doctor, a therapist or another health care professional right away. You can also call VA's Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274.

As a new Family Caregiver, you're going to be facing a lot of challenges. This checklist is just a starting point, but you can find additional tools and resources to help you in your new role at www.caregiver.va.gov.

